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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 000854

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PREL PTER ASEC ET ER

SUBJECT: UK SEEKS CONTINUED COLLABORATION TO EFFECT RELEASE
OF ETHIOPIAN HOSTAGES

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 853
1B. ASMARA 300 (NOTAL)

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING POL-ECON COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.4 (D).

11. (C) DCM and poloff met with UK Ambassador to Ethiopia Robert Dewar on March 16 to discuss the recent release of five European hostages and their return to Addis Ababa. Dewar expressed deep appreciation for USG cooperation throughout the hostage ordeal, especially for providing information on the Afar region and its stakeholders, where the kidnapping occurred, and called for continued collaboration among UK and U.S. embassies in Addis Ababa, Asmara, and Djibouti. Dewar confirmed that the five former hostages (4 Britons and 1 French national) returned in good health, and were treated decently by their captors. The freed hostages include: Peter Rudge, First Secretary, British Embassy; Jonathan Ireland, administrative support staff, British Embassy; Malcolm Smart, Department for International Development (DFID); Laure Beaufils, a French national employed by DFID; and Rosanna Moore, spouse of the head of the British Council in Addis Ababa.

12. (C) Amb. Dewar said HMG continued to be concerned about nine remaining Ethiopian hostages and their welfare, and that their safe return and release was a priority for British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett. As highlighted in a March 14 public statement issued on behalf of the freed hostages, Dewar said statements and speculation should be limited so as to not jeopardize the remaining hostages' safe release. (NOTE: Media and the GOE report that eight hostages remain captive, but the British Embassy believes there may be nine. END NOTE.)

13. (U) Dewar said the French Embassy initially alerted the British Embassy to suspicions of an abduction. A false but widely circulated report that a French tourist group was missing in the same area had heightened UK Embassy suspicions regarding the safety of the largely British tour group in the Afar region in northern Ethiopia. While the earlier rumor regarding the French tourists was soon proven false, the British Embassy had confirmed that the British tour group had been abducted on March 1. Photographs of the tourists' bullet-ridden vehicles circulated in the media less than a week after the abduction. Dewar reported that the emptied vehicles were completely disabled by gunfire, but that no hostages were injured as a result. He confirmed details of

their abduction in the midst of an ARDUF raid on an Ethiopian tax office (ref B).

¶4. (U) In response to the hostage-taking, Post issued a warden message on March 8 announcing new restrictions on travel of Embassy personnel along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: We refer to intel channels for the extent of Eritrea's role in the hostage-taking. In a subsequent meeting on March 19 with P-5, EU, and other Ambassadors (ref A), State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda blamed Eritrean intelligence for orchestrating the hostage-taking, and said Ethiopia would seek to condemn Eritrea at the African Union and the UN. Ethiopia's desire to highlight Eritrean culpability runs counter to the UK's belief that such publicity could endanger the remaining hostages. END COMMENT.

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